THAT WHICH IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A compound represented by the formula:

$$CH_2=CZ-CO_2-POLY-W-POLY'-Q$$

where

Z represents H or alkyl;

POLY and POLY' are poly(alkylene oxide) groups that can be the same or different and are represented by the formula $-(CH_2CHRO)_n-CH_2CHR-$ in which R is H or alkyl, and n ranges from about 10 to about 4000;

Q represents a functional group; and

W represents a hydrolytically unstable linkage.

2. The compound of Claim 1, wherein POLY and POLY' are poly(ethylene glycol).

3. The compound of Claim 1, wherein W comprises a hydrolyzable covalent bond selected from the group consisting of esters, orthoesters, imines, acetals, peptide bonds, and disulfides.

4. The compound of Claim 1, wherein Q is selected from the group consisting of aldehydes, carboxylic acids, active esters, active carbonates, sulfonate esters, amines, hydrazides, orthopyridyl disulfides, and thiols.